JACLR
Journal of Artistic Creation and Literary Research

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Volume 10 Issue 2 (December 2022)

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Recommended Citation

Camacho Núñez, Marta. "'When She Talks, I Hear the Revolution': Feminism in Punk Music" JACLR: Journal of Artistic Creation and Literary Research 10.2 (2022): <https://www.ucm.es/siim/journal-of-artistic-creation-and-literary-research>

Abstract: Born in the 90s in Olympia, Washington, The Riot Grrrl movement is considered both a branch or subgenre within punk music, and one of the most influential subcultural and underground scenes of the last three decades that merges feminism, politics, and music. The aim of this paper is to provide a thorough analysis of nine of the most iconic and relevant punk songs from a feminist approach. The Riot Grrrl movement was created from the ashes of punk and its ethics of inclusiveness and integration, and to serve as a safe haven to discuss female concerns and to spread feminist ideas among a new and younger audience. Performers such as Patti Smith and Poly Styrene, and bands like The Slits and X-Ray Spex laid a strong and solid foundation during the late 1970s for future generations to come, and they were promptly followed by iconic Kathleen Hanna from Bikini Kill, and many others like Bratmobile, Heavens to Betsy, Sleater-Kinney, Huggy Bear, Linus, and Skinned Teen. Ultimately, the objective is to highlight the contribution of these female artists and bands to the third- and fourth-wave feminist movement, and to emphasise the importance of popular culture in feminist activism.

Keywords: feminism, music, punk, sexism, gender, popular culture

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"'When She Talks, I Hear the Revolution': Feminism in Punk Music"

0. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to provide an analysis of nine of the most iconic and relevant songs within the scope of female punk-rock music groups from a feminist approach. This selection is comprised mainly of American and British bands that range in time from the late 70s to the mid-90s. In each of the lyrics the authors tackle several crucial concerns for the feminist agenda – such as stereotypical feminine behaviour, gender-based violence, sexuality, and female friendship – that will be thoroughly examined from the viewpoint of feminist studies.

The objective is to highlight the importance of female contribution to punk – a traditionally male-oriented and male-dominated realm in music – as part of the third- and fourth-wave feminist movement. Ultimately, by analysing the theoretical feminist background present in the field of punk, the goal is to bring to light the extent to which this popular culture manifestation influences and plays a decisive role in the development of the feminist ideology and agenda.

1. A brief account of the history of the Riot Grrrl movement

The Riot Grrrl movement is considered, musically speaking, a branch or subgenre within punk. Culturally, is one of the most influential subcultural and underground movements of the last three decades that merges feminism, politics, and music. It was born in the early 90s in the city of Olympia, Washington, and gained popularity fairly quickly, extending, first throughout the US and later to several other countries, especially in western societies. It is, however, impossible to understand the Riot Grrrl scene without taking a look first into the origins and evolution of punk.

Punk as a genre and subculture appeared in the mid-70s simultaneously in different countries, but Great Britain was the most prominent one (followed closely by the United States). It emerged as a response to the harsh social, political and working conditions imposed on a generation that felt alienated and disenchanted with a hypocritical country that was celebrating its past (such as the Silver Jubilee of Elizabeth II in 1977), while the present for the youth was marked with discrimination (Garrigós 11). In the US, punk overthrew the hippie movement with completely new and opposite values, attitudes, aesthetics, and a musical style. It promised a freedom that had not been possible before, stimulating the talent of a whole generation and becoming the voice of protest of those people, their poetry, and their lifestyle. For Begoña Astigárraga (Las Vulpes, bass), punk was the means to express nonconformity and social dissatisfaction;[1] it was living fast and being both proud of and enraged for being an outcast (Garrigós 61). Punk exerted attraction and repulsion at the same time, an ever-present

[1] Las Vulpes was a Spanish punk-rock band from Barakaldo (Basque Country) formed in 1982. They gained an enormous popularity after an interview for TVE's program *Caja de ritmos*, where they performed "Me gusta ser una zorra" ("I Like Being a Slut") during children's programming.

dichotomy that very few musical movements have been able to replicate. It was loud and obnoxious, outrageous, and provocative, and it "attacked the assumed naturalness of the structures in the popular music industry and in society at large," questioning social injustice, inequality, and oppression (Daugherty 29).

According to Ana da Silva (The Raincoats, vocals, and guitar), punk had to do with the soul, the energy and the capacity to talk about society with strength but without a particularly solid technical knowledge in music (Garrigós 39).[2] This is precisely one of the characteristics that made punk accessible to anyone that wanted to use it as a medium of expression, the do it yourself motto. This DIY mindset was what encouraged several women to be part of the movement, since decades of male dominance in music had slowly but surely instilled the idea that female musicians were less skilled instrumentalists.[3]

Punk, honouring the very spirit it embodied, lived hard and died young. By the beginning of the 80s the movement was no longer relevant, neither musically, socially nor culturally. The bands disbanded or changed their style, with few exceptions like The Buzzcocks or The Ramones. During its peak, punk had been mostly ruled by men, and female artists were consistently shunned and ignored, with some exceptions like X-Ray Spex, The Slits, or The Raincoats. The 80s were not going to be different. With punk evolving into a more hardcore style, and heavy metal becoming popular, the musical scene became hyper-masculinised, pushing women out of the subculture musically and physically, since shows were becoming increasingly violent (Roberson 10–11).

The 90s, however, marked a turning point. That turning point was located primarily in the Northwest (Olympia, Washington) and in the East Coast (Washington, D.C.). Punk communities in Olympia and Washington D.C. had been very active from the beginning, mainly thanks to their strong political and activist atmosphere, but throughout the 80s their scenes took separate ways. Washington D.C. became the "home to the hardcore style, a highly aggressive, fast-tempo distillation of certain punk ideals: exclusivity … anger, nihilism, paranoia, extreme politics … and the sense that the world was so doomed that no positive change would occur unless people took action themselves" (Wilson 41). This pushed women out of the movement and live shows, and venues rarely hosted female performers. Olympia, however, was more welcoming and supportive for women, and its long and rich artistic and feminist tradition triggered the appearance of multiple all-female bands.[4]

It is extremely difficult to pinpoint exactly when and who started it all, but it is safe to say that the band Bikini Kill and two of its founding members, Kathleen Hanna and Tobi Vail,

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[2] The Raincoats was a British post-punk band active between the years 1977 and 1984. They are regarded as one of the most important underground and experimental bands in Britain, and their debut album *The Raincoats* deeply influenced Nirvana's Kurt Cobain, who became their champion.

[3] Historically, both black and white female artists have been placed in the position of the singer. According to Rebecca Daugherty, "the connection of the voice to the body falls in line with women's 'biologically determined' social roles" which meant that "vocalists were not seen as skilled musicians" (27).

[4] The city of Olympia is considered the cultural centre of the southern Puget Sound region and a regional centre for fine arts. "Historically, Olympia has benefited from an enduring gender-balanced music scene, support for independent means of producing art and music as well as a strong feminist artistic and cultural legacy" (Downes 14)

were the cornerstone of the Riot Grrrl movement.[5] They coined the term, substituting the word "girl" with the more aggressive "grrrl", and in 1991 they published the "Riot Grrrl Manifesto" (see Appendix 1) in the Bikini Kill Zine 2. In this manifesto, they declared that the movement should be a safe haven for women, a place where they could express themselves freely, support each other, denounce inequality, abuse and male oppression. They also stated that "girls constitute a revolutionary soul force that can, and will change the world for real" (Riot Grrrl Manifesto line 38).

Riot Grrrl had a small following at first, but later it started to spread to different cities, states and countries. Bikini Kill was soon joined by Bratmobile, Heavens to Betsy, and Sleater-Kinney (among others) in the US, and Huggy Bear, Linus, and Skinned Teen in the UK. "Riot grrrl bands did play at well-known punk venues in cities, but they also played shows at overnight art galleries and alleyways, which added to their allure" (Roberson 14). Riot Grrrl also meant an enormous change and revolution to the female audience attending the shows. While in the origins of punk women were normally pushed to the back of venues, physically assaulted, and even molested, now they were encouraged to take an active role over men. Kathleen Hanna's signature "girls to the front" became the new motto.

Many of the Riot Grrrl original bands and artists did not stay relevant in the musical scene for a very long time, though. As it happened with 70s punk, the DIY and anti-capitalist mentality damaged them commercially in the long run. However, as Angela Wilson states: "Riot Grrrl is an important development in popular music and in feminist and gender politics, and it provides the historical and theoretical context for the majority of current feminist bands" (39).

2. Stereotypes of femininity: The Slits, "Typical Girls" (1979)

The Slits was a punk and post-punk band from London, founded in 1976. With an original line-up that consisted of Ari Up (Ariane Forster), Palmolive (Paloma Romero), Viv Albertine and Tessa Pollitt, The Slits became widely popular within the punk scene very quickly, not transcending, however, "into the realm of commercial success … receiving most of their attention within the confines of the subculture" (Roberson 10).[6] They are regarded still to this day as one of the most influential bands of punk in general and the Riot Grrrl movement specifically.

Their song "Typical Girls" was written by the four members of the band and released in 1979 as part of their debut album Cut and as a B-side single along with "I Heard it through the Grapevine".[7] It became an instant success and is still considered "a seminal anthem" of

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[5] Singer, musician, and feminist activist Kathleen Hanna (1968) was one of the pioneers of the Riot Grrrl movement. She has fronted the bands Bikini Kill, Le Tiger, and The Julie Ruin (still active) and was featured in a documentary film called "The Punk Singer" (2013) that deals with her life and career.

[6] Paloma Romero, best known as Palmolive, is a Spanish musician born in 1954. She moved to London in 1972 and co-founded The Slits after a brief experience in Sid Vicious's group The Flowers of Romance. She was later drummer in The Raincoats and eventually moved to the U.S.A, where she retired from music (Garrigós 109).

[7] The Slits recorded a cover of Motown's classic "I Heard it Through the Grapevine," most famously performed by Marvin Gaye. The song is a first-person account on how the singer discovers his partner's infidelity and his feelings thereon.

the movement (Goldman 70). The song is a satire of the traditional views on femininity imposed on girls and women, through magazines and the media. The lyrics challenge the yoke of gender norms established by society and propose a new standard of girlhood.

2.1. Traditional views on femininity

As Kate Millett stated in her 1970 magnum opus, Sexual Politics, "sex category" is formed "based on the needs and values of the dominant group and dictated by what its members cherish in themselves and find convenient in subordinates: aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy in the male; passivity, ignorance, docility, 'virtue', and ineffectuality in the female" (26).[8] That is to say, gender stereotypes are constructed to maintain the hegemony of the dominant group over the oppressed one. Traditional views on femininity mark women as the "weaker sex" to secure patriarchal subjugation on them.

The lyrics of "Typical Girls" (see Appendix 2) start with a command that ironically encourages girls to adapt and follow the traditional notion of feminine passivity and delicacy: "don't create, don't rebel, have intuition, can't decide". This is followed by a series of statements of what a typical girl is and how she should behave. Specifically, stereotypical girls are controlled by their emotions and devoid of any type of agency upon their acts: "get upset too quickly," "can't control themselves", "unpredictable". They are constantly worrying about their physical appearance – "worry about spots, fat", "can't decide what clothes to wear" – and their ultimate objective is to "stand by their man".[9]

The concern about physical appearance and appeal is a recurrent issue among women, who have been historically valued for their looks. This, according to sociologist Rose Weitz, "serves as an indirect form of power, by increasing women's odds of obtaining the protection of powerful men" (qtd. in Carson 116) if they conform to the standard of beauty. In the sphere of music, female performers "are constrained, penalized, or rewarded based on their approximations of culturally appropriate standards of beauty, in a way male rockers are not" (Carson 134), being judged more by their physique than by their skill as musicians.

As Virginie Despentes affirms at the beginning of her collection of essays, King Kong Theory, "never before has society demanded as much proof of submission to an aesthetic ideal, or as much body modification, to achieve physical femininity" (20).[10] However, she continues, this "overbranding of femininity" works as a means to compensate for the loss of masculine hegemony, given the fact that women have been granted a freedom of acting and thinking that was forbidden before (Despentes 20). In this sense, "Typical Girls" emphasises the concerns on beauty and appearance that a girl should display, depicting her as a commodity

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[8] Published in 1970 by American writer and activist Kate Millett (1934–2017), *Sexual Politics* is considered one of the most important texts on radical feminism. The book explores the subjugation of women and the dynamics of power in regard to sexuality and gender.

[9] This is a reference to country singer Tammy Wynette's hit "Stand by your Man," which encouraged women to be faithful and loyal to their husbands or boyfriends at any cost and under any circumstances.

[10] *King Kong Theory* is a book written by French novelist and filmmaker Virginie Despentes (1969), published in 2006. Comprised by seven short essays, it is a controversial autobiographical account on Despentes experiences and provocative reflections on rape, prostitution, capitalism, and punk feminism.

and a manufactured product of society: “Who’s bringing out the new improved model? And there's another marketing ploy”.

But aside from the depiction of societal impositions upon femininity, the lyrics of “Typical Girls” have an underlying critique of “the poisoned misogynistic ‘compliment’ ‘You’re not like most girls’” (Martín 171). The song is not only an attack on male pressure on women to adapt to their view on female behaviour, but an attack on the male hypocritical attitude that rewards girls who do not conform to the standard they have themselves forced upon them. American actress and singer Hailee Steinfield has addressed this concern in her song “Most Girls”, stating that the compliment was “derogatory”, and that “there’s been this golden standard or rule that in order to be special you have to be different to other women” (Martín 171).

2.2. Subversion of female roles in punk music

One of the cornerstones of the Riot Grrrl movement was the subversion of female roles in society. The name itself, allegedly coined by Bikini Kill’s Kathleen Hanna, is a “re-signifying [of] the word ‘girl’ and its social connotations of passivity and infantilism” (Gamboa 77). By adding a ‘growl,’ which is typically associated with aggressiveness and strength, they not only subverted the term, but they also reclaimed it from the dominant patriarchal ideology. “Typical Girls” was meant to encourage girls to pursue an alternative behaviour to traditional impositions on them.

This advocation for the obliteration of patriarchal constraints on female conduct was already present in the origins of punk, but the systematic shunning and disdain for punk women outside the scene was significant. Punk girls had to rely on the support of other female punks and found a haven there, a place where they could be themselves. Vulpes’s Begoña Astigárraga claims that all they wanted to do was to travel, play their music, have fun and fight for equality in society, without controlling boyfriends or moral impositions reserved only for women (Garrigós 84). This is precisely what tradition was telling them not to do, since girls “don’t create” and “don’t rebel,” according to “Typical Girls.”

One of the most obvious and straightforward methods to reclaim and display that new standard of femininity was through clothing: “stylistically, women used clothing to critique oppressive ideals of beauty, to undermine the definition of women as sex objects, and to mark the body as a site of resistance” (Daugherty 31). It was very usual among female punk musicians to wear overly feminine, revealing attires, and even bondage gear during the performances.[11] According to Daugherty, this appropriation of pornography elements was done to demystify the female body and deconstruct the image of women as sex objects (31).

In contrast, on some other occasions performers chose to dress in an androgynous manner to challenge expectations from the audience: “performers such as Peaches will perform with a beard and facial hair, representing a clear rejection of what’s acceptable on a broad

[11] Kathleen Hanna used to perform wearing a schoolgirl outfit and pigtails (Roberson 11), while singer Siouxsie Sioux, and model and punk icon Pamela “Jordan” Rooke usually wore lingerie and underwear as outerwear (Daugherty 32).

social scale but also what's acceptable within the subculture" (Roberson 26). "Typical Girls" highlights the importance of garments in the construction of femininity stating in the lyrics that typical girls "can't decide what clothes to wear," implying that under this new conception of girlhood, girls can and do decide freely and unapologetically what to wear and how they present themselves. Ultimately, destroying these traditional codes of dressing had the objective of reinventing femininity altogether.

Punk-rock girls in the scene made use of scandalous and outrageous performances as well to critique traditional views on femininity, destabilising expected patterns of behaviour and creating a new model for female demeanour (Daugherty 32). Society's paradigm of the punk-rocker was the rowdy, loud, and obnoxious boy. That type of conduct was certainly not very well received outside the scene, but it was even more condemned and censured in the case of punk girls. Performers like Kathleen Hanna adopted a very distinct way of singing with the use of screaming, usually reserved for male singers, defying preconceptions about feminine behaviour. In this sense, her screams were not a mere imitation of male punk vocal tradition but a challenge to "the normative associations with women's screaming, such as hysterics, victimization, or 'bitchiness'" (Gamboa 91).

"Typical Girls" could be misread as an attack on archetypical feminine roles that dismisses and diminishes girls who act that way. However, as stated earlier, The Slits were cunningly criticising male double standards that impose traditional views on femininity, while rewarding the deviation from the norm of girls who are not like the rest. This paradox has its origin in the Victorian conception of the ideal woman as the "angel in the house" and the "fallen woman" as her counterpart.[12] Women belonged to one of these two categories but could not be both at the same time. With a very direct and candid style, this song is a portrayal of the modern version of this bipolarity and encourages girls to step out of the roles that have been imposed on them and freely choose and pursue their own notion of femininity.

3. Harassment and violence: Brush Tetras, "Too Many Creeps" (1980) and Kleenex, "Hitch-hike" (1980)

Bush Tetras is a still-active American post-punk band formed in 1979, acclaimed within the scene in New York. According to Vivien Goldman, their "experimental, edgy and confrontational" style "fit perfectly with British bands like the Delta 5 and the Gang of Four" (49).[13] Their song "Too Many Creeps" was written by them and released in 1980 as part of their debut 7" EP of the same name, and it deals with street harassment, an all too familiar concern for many women who do not feel safe going out alone, and eventually resign to do it altogether. The lyrics explore these feelings of uneasiness and weariness.

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[12] For Victorian society, the perfect woman had to be submissive, passive, graceful, and pure. The concept "the angel in the house" comes from the title of one of Coventry Patmore's most popular poems, published in 1854. The "fallen woman," in contrast, represented a corrupted and impure woman who had lost her innocence and chastity. This term was applied indiscriminately to any white woman that failed to meet strict Victorian standards of femininity.

[13] British writer, journalist, and musician Vivien Goldman (1952) was one of the prominent figures of the punk movement of the 70s. Her work in the media and several musical publications contributed to the spread and better understanding not only of punk, but also reggae, soul, and R&B. She is best known for her book "The Revenge of the She-Punks," an account on feminist punk history.

Kleenex was a Swiss punk-rock band formed in 1978. Due to a threat on legal action by the owner of the Kleenex trademark, they were forced to change their name to LiLiPUT, but their eponymous debut EP was released under their former name. They attracted the attention of British disc jockey John Peel and toured along with The Raincoats, providing them with enough visibility to be regarded as one of Kurt Cobain's favourite bands. Their song "Hitch-hike," of their own authorship, was released in 1980 and completely rerecorded in 1993, and tackles the issue of harassment and violence against young girls in public places.

3.1. Gender-based violence

The lyrics of the songs "Too Many Creeps" (see Appendix 3) and "Hitch-hike" (see Appendix 4) tackle two of the main concerns for the feminist agenda: gender-based street harassment and, more generally, physical, and verbal abuse and violence. The first-person voice in "Too Many Creeps" narrates in a colloquial way does not want to go "out in the streets no more" because people "give [her] the creeps". It is implied that she has been stalked before, since she states that she cannot "pay the price of shopping around no more." In "Hitch-hike," the narrator switches from third- to first-person to talk about a girl that needed transportation but "had no money to pay the train." She is forced to hitchhike and is therefore presumably molested by the driver: "don't touch me … I'm afraid … let me be". Using an extremely simple style and constant repetitions, "Hitch-hike" gets straight to the point without lyrical embellishments of any type.

As a victim of rape while hitchhiking herself, Virginie Despentes advocated for an approach to rape that, instead of further victimising and shunning the victims, empowered them to talk about their experience. Inspired by American feminist Camille Paglia, she started to think of them as "warriors – no longer personally responsible for something [they] had asked for, but ordinary victims of what you have to expect you may endure if you're a woman and you want to venture into the wild" (40). Paglia represented rape not as an "unspeakable horror" but as a "political circumstance" (40), and taught Despentes and many others to face the trauma and work towards healing.

In this sense, songs like "Too Many Creeps" and "Hitch-hike" were necessary to reinforce this message of agency in a situation where women are rendered powerless and vulnerable. The girl in "Hitch-hike" has no other method to defend herself rather than saying "don't touch me," while in "Too Many Creeps" the narrator avoids confrontation altogether by not going outside because "there's just nothing that's worth the cost" of being harassed. Both songs highlight the helplessness and resignation of these girls, exposing one of the biggest issues within rape culture. As Despentes says, "we insist on behaving as if rape were extraordinary and isolated … whereas it's quite the opposite – it's at the centre, the heart, the foundation of our sexualities" (46).

Another glaring problem was the violence present within the punk scene itself. Begoña Astigárraga states that there were punk songs that talked about possessing and raping women, and even killing girlfriends out of jealousy (Garrigós 86), such as "Get Raped" by Eater. Tere González, singer of the group Desechables, adds that during concerts they were constantly

called ‘whores’ by male spectators, and sometimes even by other girls (Garrigós 150).[14] It may seem that a movement such as punk, that proclaimed inclusive ethics and a DIY culture where anyone could be a musician would be more accepting towards women. However, as in any other male-dominant music and cultural scene, patriarchal and misogynistic attitudes remained.

Female performers were constantly marginalised and excluded from male-dominant spaces in punk and rock. They were seen as “a threat to the masculine solidarity of boy bands” and “a hazard to [their] integrity” (Daugherty 33). This type of psychological and verbal violence was worsened by many instances of physical assaults. Singer Ari Up, from The Slits, was stabbed in 1976 by a man in a club, and Lucy O’Brien, from the band Catholic Girls, recalls a show where “a crowd of around 20 of [the audience members] followed us outside and attacked us” (Daugherty 33).

Violence extended to female attendants to the shows as well. Increasingly violent punk concerts pushed girls out of the venues, both figuratively and literally. A particularly disgraceful episode of misogyny and cruelty (that will be thoroughly analysed later) took place during the Woodstock ’99 musical festival, where several women were molested and raped. Under this atmosphere of fear and hate, songs like “Too Many Creeps” and “Hitch-hike” were imperative in order to expose the problem and give voice to the victims, as well as to assert dominance and provide agency over to issue to female bands and performers, who featured this topic in their songs in order to break the circle of submission and silence.

3.2. The Riot Grrrl scene as a safe haven

The valuable work in helping victims and raising awareness carried out by female punk bands was most noticeable during the Riot Grrrl movement. Musicians like Kathleen Hanna, who worked for many years in shelters to help abused women and teenage girls, started to incorporate her experience into her concerts and lyrics. She declared that “she was frustrated with performers’ failure to engage emotionally with their spectators and their refusal to acknowledge sexual harassment in the audience” (Wilson 52). The Riot Grrrl Manifesto itself encouraged victims to take control over their bodies and support each other, empowering themselves through confessional discourse.[15]

It was very common during Riot Grrrl concerts for girls to protect each other from male violence and abuse, and for performers to keep an eye on the crowd to make sure that it was a safe environment. It was Kathleen Hanna the one who originated the celebrated catchphrase “girls to the front.” The idea behind it was to build a human wall of girls between the stage and the back of the venue, where most assaults took place, protecting girls from getting badly

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[14] The band Desechables was formed in Vallirana (Barcelona) in 1981 and is best known for the album “Golpe tras golpe”, released after the death of their guitarist Miguel González. Tere “Desechable” González was one of the founders and sole singer, at only 14 years old. With influences from The Ramones and Iggy Pop, they made their debut in 1982 and disbanded around 1988 after a turbulent career. Tere González is still active as a musician.

[15] The Riot Grrrl Manifesto (see Appendix 1) states that they “want and need to encourage and be encouraged in the face of all [their] own insecurities” and that they are “unwilling to let [their] real and valid anger be diffused and/or turned against [them]”.

injured in male mosh-pits and pogos and giving them their own space to "fight and play rough at [their] shows" (Roberson 15).[16]

While the songs "Too Many Creeps" and "Hitch-hike" relied heavily on the feelings of frustration and helplessness of women to raise awareness and solidarity, others – such as 7 Years Bitch's track "Dead Men Don't Rape" – approached the problem reverting the roles and turning victims into victimisers. According to Kanagawa, these "female avengers" represent a powerful tool in the women's liberation movement, and resist, rather than reproduce, male domination discourses (1). In any case, it is undeniable that songs like these played a fundamental role in the struggle against sexist violence. Using a popular medium like music and an appealing genre for younger listeners to expose and deal with a taboo matter made the problem more visible and the solution closer.

4. Women and sex: X-Ray Spex, "Oh Bondage! Up Yours!" (1977) and Bikini Kill, "I Like Fucking" (1995)

X-Ray Spex was an English punk-rock band formed in 1976 in London. Featuring iconic performer Poly Styrene, the band is considered one of the most influential of the punk scene, despite only releasing five singles and one album.[17] Their most acclaimed song, "Oh Bondage! Up Yours!," written by Styrene and released in 1977 as their debut single is an anthem of sexual freedom and liberation. As Vivien Goldman states, "the bondage she [Styrene] sang about was not S&M; rather, it was the patriarchy I had been hearing about since feminism had started to filter through just a few years ago" (4).

The American punk band Bikini Kill, formed in Olympia, Washington, in 1990, was undoubtedly one of the pioneers of the Riot Grrrl movement. One of its founding members, lead singer and songwriter Kathleen Hanna, is considered the herald and originator of the scene, inspiring girls "to not only create and become involved in popular music, but to do so with political awareness and feminist goals in mind" (Gamboa 1). Their single "I Like Fucking" was composed by the four of them and released in 1995 as a declaration of intent on female sexuality and a satire of traditionally hyper-sexualised songs performed by male musicians.

4.1. Repression of female sexuality

The lyrics of "Oh Bondage! Up Yours!" (see Appendix 5) open with a highly significant and powerful statement – "some people think little girls should not be seen and not heard" – and continues with a series of requests that can be read in two very different ways: either as desires of sexual nature like "bind me, tie me, chain me to the wall", or as a denounce of

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[16] Mosh-pits and pogos are typical dances performed during punk, rock, and heavy-metal concerts. In mosh-pits, the crowd usually assembles in the centre of the place and participants slam into each other. In pogos, they jump up and down in place, sometimes colliding against one another. There are several extremely aggressive variants of mosh-pits, such as 'the wall of death' (Van Poznak).

[17] Marianne Joan Elliott-Said, popularly known as Poly Styrene (1957–2011), was a British mixed-race musician and singer born to a Somali father and a Scottish-Irish mother. As a biracial woman in a white male-dominant scene, Styrene had to break through several barriers in both her personal and professional life. She has recently been the subject of a documentary, released in 2021 and co-directed by her daughter Celeste Bell, called *Poly Styrene: I Am a Cliché* that explores her legacy.

traditional repression of female sexuality: “I wanna be a slave to you all”, “I wanna be a victim for you all”. This double interpretation is what makes the song so compelling: it defies and denies that initial affirmation – that male-dominant society is more comfortable with speechless and desireless women – by using bondage practices as a metaphor for female oppression.

As Kate Millett states, “patriarchal societies typically link feelings of cruelty with sexuality” (44), associating males with sadism and females with masochism, and attaching an enormous amount of guilt and shame upon women, who are “held to be the culpable or the more culpable party in nearly any sexual liaison” (54). Therefore, in sexual practices men are expected to dominate and subjugate women, who are to remain submissive and silent. Styrene sings “trash me, crash me, beat me ’til I fall” as a denouncement of sexual cruelty, followed by a refrain that both rejects – “oh bondage, no more” – and deflects – “oh bondage, up yours” – that violence back into men.

Traditionally, female sexuality has been studied and conceived in relation to male sexuality, always from a position of inferiority; women were considered asexual creatures, while men were the ones who possessed uncontrollable sexual drive. For the founder of psychoanalyst theory Sigmund Freud, girls were born clitorally oriented and, in order to transition to womanhood, they had to transfer the sexual primacy from the clitoris to the vagina, otherwise they remained “sexually anaesthetic and psychosexually immature” (qtd. in Morgan 198). As psychiatrist Natalie Shainess states, Freud believed that women had two main tasks: to sexually attract a male partner and to bear children, and they were regarded as incomplete for their lack of phallus, motherhood being “a compensation for this deficiency” (Shainess 235). Freud’s misguided views on female sexuality were, for a very long time, highly regarded and respected.

“Oh Bondage! Up Yours!” is a reaction against these stigmas on female pleasure. The use of bondage terms coming from a young woman of colour was both challenging and demanding: “In earlier decades, when black blues singers performed primarily for black audiences, they could overtly express sexuality … But when blacks began to perform for whites, they had to subdue the sexual elements of their performances” (Carson 32). While all women, especially the ones who belong in the music industry, are sexualised, black women’s sexuality is also racialised. They feel the pressure to fit in a mould and portray an image that has been created by white men. Styrene herself claimed to feel “uncomfortable with invasive celebrity culture and the push to sexualize her” (Willoughby).

Styrene’s appropriation of these bondage and pornographic elements for her song is also an act of rebellion against male-conceived porn. Pornography remains a controversial topic among feminists but is generally considered by the majority another tool for female oppression: “men alone conceive of porn, direct it, watch it, and profit from it. And female desire is subject to the same distortion: it must only occur via the male gaze” (Despentes 96). In this sense, women are rendered passive and submissive against aggressive male sexuality. The refrain “Oh bondage, up yours, oh bondage, no more” is a subversion of this type of

pornographic discourse, with Styrene's use of the vulgar slang expression "up yours" to express her disgust and rejection.[18]

4.2. Women's sexual liberation

Bikini Kill's "I Like Fucking" (see Appendix 6) is also a subversion, in this case of typical punk-rock male "love" songs. The song begins with a rhetorical question where the voice wonders if there is something else beyond "troll-guy reality", the songs parody male speech by using the words "baby", "babe", or "sweet chickadee", followed by a series of demands on behalf of female sexual freedom. Third-wave punk feminists like Bikini Kill were concerned with the "appropriation and redefinition of sexuality … to reclaim femininity as potential spaces for female empowerment and pleasure" (Kanagawa 70). The last line of the song perfectly summarises this idea: "I believe in the radical possibilities of pleasure, babe."

Historically, women's bodies had always been subjected to male pleasure (Gamboa 93), but female performers found in punk a space to express their sexuality and desires. However, this brought a "conflict between 'performing' sexuality or stereotypes and being complicit with the very conventions it was trying to dismantle" (Gamboa 95). The hyper-sexualised attires they wore, and their provocative songs were on many occasions misinterpreted as an attempt to gain popularity and attract attention. In this sense, the voice in "I like Fucking" expresses these concerns by saying that she is afraid of being happy – that is, scared of her own pleasure – and asks an unknown addressee to "show [her] now how to lose control."

During the history of women's sexual liberation there have been two main opposing positions in the matter: on one hand, the second-wave feminists of the early 60s who were regarded as "victim" feminists, sexually conservative and passive; and on the other hand, third-wave feminists of the early 90s known as "power" feminists, who did not project aggression and competitiveness on men, but rather claimed women's equality.[19] "Victim" feminism attempted to "attain power via claims to victim status", while "power" feminism sought to "prevent [women] from being victimized again" (Kanagawa 56). In this regard, "I Like Fucking" represents third-wave postulations. Kathleen sings that only because the world is "full of rape" it does not mean that her body "must always be a source of pain," rejecting victimisation and embracing sexual agency over her own body.

In her article "Unfinished Business: Birth Control and Women's Liberation," Lucinda Cisler claims that female sexual potential and pleasure are often feared by men (254).[20] Patriarchal discourse has always claimed that sexuality and reproduction in women are

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[18] "Up yours, an exclamation of contemptuous rejection, often used *imperatively* (and accompanied by an impolite gesture) [shortened < *up your arse* (or a similar expression): compare shove]. *coarse slang*" (Oxford English Dictionary).

[19] The terms "power" and "victim" feminists were coined by the American feminist author Naomi Wolf in her study *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the Twenty-First Century* (1993) (Kanagawa 56).

[20] Lucinda Cisler (1938) is an American second-wave feminist and abortion rights activist, best known for her advocacy against anti-abortion practices, and administrative and legal obstructions to abortion procedures. Her aforementioned essay was included as a chapter in Robin Morgan's anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful*.

irrevocably joint to each other. However, as Cisler says, "the clitoris is … the only organ in human anatomy whose purpose is exclusively that of erotic excitation and release. It is the multi-functional penis … that in every sexual act is simultaneously procreative and erotic" (Cisler 254). As mentioned before, "I Like Fucking" deals with this fear of pleasure and advocates for a new paradigm of female sexuality through direct action, following once more the dictates of the more action-oriented third-wave feminism. Hanna sings that they are not going to achieve anything by just "sitting around, watching each other starve," using hunger as a metaphor for sexual dissatisfaction and, again, rejecting victimisation.

Overall, the Riot Grrrl movement opened new possibilities in the field of female performance and songwriting concerning the themes of sexual repression and desire. Punk girls overturned "the submissive model of girlhood through its sarcastic, mocking, and taunting display of innocence and sexuality" (Gamboa 93) with anthems like "I like Fucking". The title itself is a declaration of intent that shamelessly reclaims the realm of sex – traditionally owned by men – in the name of feminism. "Oh Bondage! Up Yours!" aggressively defies sexual repression while "I Like Fucking" instigates sexual liberation. Both songs contribute in conjunction to breaking taboos and debunking myths about female sexuality and libido.

5. Sisterhood: Bikini Kill, "Rebel Girl" (1993)

The hit "Rebel Girl" was released in 1993 in three different recorded versions: on a split LP shared with the band Huggy Bear, on a 7-inch vinyl record, and on Bikini Kill's first full-length album, Pussy Whipped. The song was "unusually exultant and cheering" and it became "an anthem of ferocious fun for gay and straight girls alike to dance to and feel happy because of its celebration of all forms of positive girl connection" (Goldman 32). "Rebel Girl," following Kathleen Hanna's satirical and ironic signature style, is a reversal and mockery of traditional love songs in rock. Hanna's persistent emphasis on sisterhood is deeply embedded in this song, a thrilled and elated cry for union and solidarity between women.

5.1. Female solidarity and union

The song "Rebel Girl" (see Appendix 7) is both a declaration of love and of intent. As seen in "I Like Fucking," here Bikini Kill again appropriates traditional male discourse in songwriting and subverts traditional gender roles. The female voice sings about a girl in the neighbourhood who she deeply admires and is devoted to. Despite being strongly criticised by society, the singer stays loyal to this girl, learns from her, and wants to be like her. Their friendship is a metaphor for feminism and women's liberation, and an account on how younger feminists learn from other liberation fighters and are influenced by them. The rebel girl in the song is "the queen of [the singer's] world" and her "soul sister," emphasising the importance of solidarity and union in the fight against patriarchy.

Sisterhood and sorority were one of the pillars of the Riot Grrrl movement. In the Riot Grrrl Manifesto (see Appendix 1), Bikini Kill stated that they wanted to "make it easier for girls to see/hear each other's work so that we can share strategies and criticize-applaud each other" and that they saw "fostering and supporting girl scenes and girl artists of all kinds as integral

to this process". Prior to the movement there was no cohesive or organised network of female performers in the punk scene. Riot Grrrl appeared as a necessity to create a sense of community among all these young artists that felt obliged to conform to male standards. Songs like "Rebel Girl" were a cry for mutual support and union.

According to research conducted by Suzanna Rose and Laurie Roades on the connection between female friendship and feminism published in 1987, "heterosexual feminists had significantly more cross-generational, equal, and private friendships than nonfeminists" and "feminism reportedly had enhanced the women's desire for contact with politically like-minded women" (Rose 251–252). The Riot Grrrl movement's emphasis on female support and alliance had the objective of facilitating achievements for women not only in the field of music, but also in politics and other types of public spheres. "Rebel Girl" is a call for revolution through friendship and makes use of traditional feminine attributes like hips and lips as weapons against misogyny: "in her hips, there's revolution … in her kiss, I taste the revolution".

The song also has a component of homoeroticism.[21] By using ambiguous phrases such as "I wanna take you home," "I really like you" or the aforementioned "in her kiss I taste the revolution," the lyrics play with the concept of sexual attraction, merging love and friendship. In Adrienne Rich's influential essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," she understands lesbianism as a universal female experience.[22] For her, lesbianism is not connected with sexual desire, but with emotional attachment and support. She states that "as the term 'lesbian' has been held to limiting, clinical associations in its patriarchal definition, female friendship and comradeship have been set apart from the erotic" and that "all women exist on a lesbian continuum" moving in and out of it, no matter "whether [they] identify [themselves] as lesbian or not" (Rich 650–651). The multiple innuendos in the song are more in accordance with Rich's views on lesbianism than patriarchal ones.

"Rebel Girl" is, in addition, a reminiscence of childhood and has several nostalgic elements that reclaim girlhood and denounce the loss of innocence by patriarchal authority. The rebel girl has "the hottest trike in town," which is usually a vehicle for small kids, and the voice states several times that she wants to "try on [her] clothes," a typical game among young girls and adolescents. Infantilism was typical in Bikini Kill songs and Hanna's performances, and in the Riot Grrrl movement in general.[23] The constant use of the word "girl" is not accidental, it serves as a reminder of infancy, a period when strict female repression is not as noticeable, and discrimination is not so severe.

5.2. Divide and conquer: sowing discord amongst women

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[21] The concepts of "homoeroticism" and "homoerotic" refer to "to the tendency for erotic feelings to be projected onto a person of the same sex" and "imply a preference for sameness over difference and stress the role of emotion" (*The Columbia Encyclopedia*).

[22] Adrienne Rich (1929–2012) was an American poet and essayist, and one of the most influential feminists of her time. She is best known for the coinage and development of the concepts of "lesbian continuum" and "compulsory heterosexuality" and was also prominent in the field of feminist intersectionality, supporting women of colour and advocating for racial equality (*The Columbia Encyclopedia*).

[23] As previously stated, Kathleen Hanna used to perform wearing a schoolgirl uniform and pigtails, and this was imitated by other Riot Grrrl musicians. Many other songs by Bikini Kill like "Candy," "Carnival" or "Daddy's Li'l Girl" make use of childish elements and vocabulary as well.

Apart from being an anthem of sisterhood and female solidarity, "Rebel Girl" is a critique of rivalry and competitiveness between women as well. Kate Millett affirmed that "one of the chief effects of class within patriarchy is to set one woman against another, in the past creating a lively antagonism between whore and matron, and in the present between career woman and housewife" (38). Although she referred specifically to class differences, this idea can be extrapolated to other spheres such as age or race. Within feminism there has always been fragmentation that has led to different factions, like the previously analysed "power" feminism and "victim" feminism (Wilson 32). Even the Riot Grrrl movement itself has been rightfully accused of being entirely dominated by white middle-class young girls.[24]

"Rebel Girl" starts with a line that seems belligerent towards the girl the song is about. By saying that she "thinks she's the queen of the neighbourhood," the voice mimics the stereotypical discourse of a backstabbing girl who gossips and spreads rumours. However, the song immediately changes its tone, and instead of criticising the girl, it praises her. Kathleen Hanna declared, concerning the composition of "Rebel Girl":

> I am really proud I wrote it from a personal perspective, thinking of the best girlfriends I had had. Girls have angst leveled at them all the time – you're conceited, you're snobby. It's a way to put a tag on your name, ruin your reputation. Thinking of the meanness that girls can do, I wondered – What if instead of saying, "That girl, she thinks she's so great," you could say, "And I think she's so great too. I don't care what you say about her, I'm still going to be her best friend" (Goldman 34).

The song describes at one point an attempt to put a tag and ruin the reputation, as Hanna says, of this girl and isolate her from the rest. The line "they say she's a dyke" uses homosexuality as an insult and seeks to stigmatise the girl, implying that if other girls have a friendship with her, they will also be considered "dykes."[25] The voice, however, immediately states that she does not care what they say because that girl is her best friend. "Rebel Girl," which is Bikini Kill's most iconic song, remains one of the most influential anthems in the scene concerning sorority. It was initially intended for a young female audience to whom tight-knit female friendships were crucial for their social development (Wilson 19). However, it eventually transcended age and now it serves as inspiration for all women to seek comfort, solidarity, and allegiance in one another and, most importantly, to avoid unnecessary rivalry and criticism based on patriarchal preconceptions about womanhood and female friendship.

6. Female dominance and empowerment: PJ Harvey, "50 Ft. Queenie" (1993)

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[24] According to Vera Caisip Gamboa, the movement was predominantly formed by white girls and "although [it] supported the inclusion of *all* girls in theory, the arena it took place in had a *specific audience* and, hence, riot grrrl's issues were shaped by these girls' perspectives and experiences" (81). This was very typical of rock as well, a predominantly white-dominated and white-oriented genre.

[25] The word "dyke" is a chiefly derogatory and offensive term used to refer to a lesbian or "any woman whose appearance is regarded as masculine (often used with the implication that she is a lesbian)" (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

The singer and songwriter Polly Jean "PJ" Harvey (born in Dorset, England, in 1969) is widely considered a staple of alternative rock and punk-blues. She "subverted rock patriarchy with a bone-raw blues-punk attack and graphic, skin-chafing lyricism" (Bullion). She also received several accolades, such as two Mercury Prices in 2001 and 2011, eight Brit Awards nominations, seven Grammy Award nominations, and three Rolling Stone recognitions for Best New Artist and Best Singer Songwriter in 1992, and Artist of the Year in 1995. In 2013 she was awarded the MBE (Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) for services to music.

Her song "50 Ft. Queenie", composed by her, was released as a single in 1993 and featured in her second studio album Rid of Me that same year – an album that ranked 153 on Rolling Stone's "500 Greatest Albums of All Time" in 2020. Taking inspiration from the 1958 horror movie Attack of the 50 Foot Woman, Harvey aggressively asserts herself and her music in a male-dominant industry.[26] Although she always felt reluctant to label herself as feminist and chose instead to pledge "allegiance … to male icons like the Rolling Stones, Nick Cave, and Howlin' Wolf" (Bullion), PJ Harvey felt the need in this occasion to assert and advocate for female-dominance and empowerment.

6.1. Empowerment through punk music

The lyrics of "50 Ft. Queenie" (see Appendix 8) are a fierce and unapologetic defence of women in music and serve as the perfect example of how the punk scene and the Riot Grrrl movement encouraged female artists to express and empower themselves. In her song Harvey becomes a giant queen, the "number one, second to no one," strong, invulnerable, and independent. In a satirical reverse of roles, she calls herself a "king" and asks to be measured, stating that she is "twenty … thirty … forty … fifty inches long," mocking traditional men's obsession with size and associations of physical magnitude with power and authority. The song has a tempo and style that reminds of that of hip-hop and rap battles, though the vocals and instrumentation are undoubtedly punk rock.

Portuguese musician and artist Ondina Pires states that during the 1960s women were not treated equally at an artistic level compared to men.[27] "There was misogyny among the hippies" she says, "but within the punk counterculture, for the first time, women and men were on an equal footing" (Garrigós 104–105). Punk allowed female artists to sing about concerns that were not suitable for other genres at the time, and the Riot Grrrl revolution revived the spirit years later. Moreover, allegiance to the movement as either a musician or a fan gave girls the courage to think, talk, and behave differently. "50 Ft. Queenie" is an anthem of female empowerment through the musical medium and, as Harvey sings, "you oughta hear [her] song".

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[26] *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* is an American 1958 sci-fi horror movie directed by Nathan Duran and starring Alison Hayes, who plays the role of a rich socialite who, after an alien encounter, grows to an amazing size and takes her revenge on her cheating husband (IMDB).

[27] Ondina Pires (1961) started her career as a musician in 1983, participating in three different groups: Pop Dell'Arte, Ezra Pound & A Loucura, and Great Lesbian Show as a drummer and singer. She was one of the pioneers of the punk scene in Portugal and has also worked as a writer and pictorial artist (Garrigós 93).

Chicana singer Alice Bag claims that punk had its own beauty standards and values, and that women in the scene were not merely relegated to the role of muse or groupie.[28] According to her, "punk allowed women to be complete human beings that could celebrate their own creative and sexual impulses" (Garrigós 26). The original punk scene of which Alice Bag was a part of was the culmination of the second wave feminist movement, and several of the female punks (who were in many cases too young to be educated in feminist theory) did not identify themselves with feminism. However, they paved the way to the Riot Grrrl phenomenon, which was led by college students who were more in touch with activism, acting as the main catalyst of third-wave feminism.[29]

In her song "50 Ft. Queenie" PJ Harvey not only usurps a place historically reserved for men by proclaiming herself "king", but she also turns them into vassals – "you bend over, Casanova" – and claims to be the biggest woman and that "nothing can touch [her]". Though the lyrics at this point can be misinterpreted as a glorification of female chauvinism, Alice Bags explains a similar case concerning the name of one of the groups she performed with: Castration Squad. She assures that despite its aggressive name, the idea behind it was to "castrate patriarchy, not men as individuals" (Garrigós 27). The ultimate objective was to deconstruct both male and female roles created and imposed by the patriarchal system, not only by empowering women, but also by involving men in a process of mutual liberation, a very similar aim followed by Harvey with her "50 Ft. Queenie".[30]

In an analysis made by professor Loren Skye Roberson of punk music from the perspective of composition studies, she establishes that "the punk scene and the university are both sites of male dominance, where being a woman is a disadvantage" (21–22). However, by embracing their female identity "compositionists and punks alike don't just assert agency, they demand its legitimacy" (Roberson 21–22). In "50 Ft. Queenie" the objective is the same: asserting dominance is not enough if it is not legitimised. By reversing gender roles and adopting male attributes such as the already discussed matters of size and kingship, Harvey is appropriating an already legitimised view – male superiority – in the name of women.

Punk music was, therefore, the perfect medium to convey and transmit female claims on validation and empowerment by usurping male power. The idea behind "50 Ft. Queenie" and the whole album Rid of Me was precisely this: it "didn't just reorient rock 'n' roll's lusty, predatory id through a female gaze; it treated the bedroom as a battleground and sex as bloodsport" (Bullion).[31] That female gaze is present in the song to reorient classical male-

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[28] Alicia Armendáriz, best known as Alice Bag, was born to Mexican parents in Los Angeles in 1958. She was the lead singer of The Bags and remains a dedicated activist and feminist to this day. She has published two memoirs, *Violence Girl: East L.A. Rage to Hollywood Stage, a Chicana Punk Story* (2011) and *Pipe Bomb for the Soul* (2015) (Garrigós 19).

[29] The Riot Grrrl community was inspired to organise "when faced with the media message that feminism was no longer necessary in the 1990s, and that young women were not interested in feminist causes", inspiring them to create "a network for the discussion of feminist issues" (Wilson 54).

[30] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word "queenie" as both "an informal name or form of address" for a queen (especially with reference to Queen Elizabeth II) and a colloquialism for "an effeminate male, a homosexual" (*OED*). The double meaning of the term adds another layer of interpretation and has led some to consider the song as a gay anthem.

[31] "The concept of the 'female gaze' could be seen as a response to feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey's term, the 'male gaze,' which represents the gaze of a heterosexual male viewer along with the male

female relationships and give agency to both the voice singing and the female listener. In the end chorus, the "queen" keeps growing as she sings, apparently endlessly; the use of physical size as a means of empowerment appears in another track of the album, "Man-Size," satirising macho identity. Despite Harvey's multiple and persistent claims of not identifying herself or her music as "feminist," "50 Ft. Queenie" and Rid of Me have a powerful and undeniable feminist reading that inspired and influenced female artists and listeners alike.

7. Misogyny in music and subversion of male dominance: Sleater-Kinney, "#1 Must Have" (2000) and Patti Smith, "Gloria: In Excelsis Deo" (1975)

Sleater-Kinney was formed in Olympia in 1994 by Corin Tucker and Carrie Brownstein, who had both previously been members of the punk groups Heavens to Betsy and Excuse 17, respectively. The still active band emerged during the last years of the movement, and generally "avoids the riot grrl (sic) label but claims the influence of groups such as Kim Gordon's Sonic Youth" (Carson 92). However, their combination of personal and political approaches to female concerns makes them one of the key names in feminist punk. Their song "#1 Must Have" was written by them and released in 2000 as a response to the shameful misogyny reaction that surrounded the several accusations of rapes and assaults suffered by women during the Woodstock '99 music festival.[32]

Iconic poet, musician and singer-songwriter Patti Smith (Chicago, Illinois, 1946) very well deserves the title "punk poet laureate" by which she is best known for. Smith is widely regarded as one of the most influential and prominent artists of her time, and her work, a fusion of punk-rock and poetry, speaks for itself. Her 1975 song "Gloria: In Excelsis Deo" is a cover and repurposing of Van Morrison's 1964 "Gloria" that turns his "account of the vixen in a red dress into a tumultuous lesbian affair" during a time when women's "political discourse was understated when compared to their male counterparts" (Roberson 28). This reinvention and assimilation of traditional male discourse established the basis for a future female domination in music.

7.1. Misogyny in music

When Sleater-Kinney transcended the realm of underground music and reached mainstream, they "were urged to drop their political stances if they wanted to make it" (Bullion). Their response was "#1 Must Have" (see Appendix 9), a powerful denounce of the misogyny reigning in the music industry prompted by several reports of sexual violence towards women attending the Woodstock '99 musical festival. The lyrics of the song try to re-validate and revive the Riot Grrrl movement which, at that time, had stopped being relevant and some of its main figures had been accused of being sellouts: "bearer of the flag from the beginning now, who would

character and the male creator of the film" (Smith). Female gaze is, therefore, the representation of women in the media as characters with agency, not subjected or objectified for male sexual fantasies.

[32] Woodstock '99 was held between the 22nd and the 25th of July 1999 in Rome, New York, as an attempt to emulate the original Woodstock Music and Art Fair of 1969. During the event, two female fans were raped in mosh pits and there were further reports of sexual assaults, all of them having taken place during concerts, in broad daylight, and witnessed by other attendants (Vanhorn).

have believed this riot girl's a cynic? But they took our ideas to their marketing stars." The song also contains a strong denounce of the aforementioned events at Woodstock – "and will there always be concerts where women are raped?" – and a plea for safety and inclusion: "the number one must have is that we are safe".

Historically, women – especially those belonging to ethnic minorities – have been relegated to the role of either the singer or the groupie, both being objects of desire for a male audience (Daugherty 27). This tendency continued through the decades, reaching the seemingly inclusive genre of punk: "as '50s rock 'n' roll paved the way for '60s rock and '70s punk, Black women were repeatedly erased from the narrative. According to the popularized version of music history, punk is rooted in straight white male rage" (Willoughby).[33] The Riot Grrrl scene had managed to reclaim a space for women in music outside traditional female roles, but as the movement disappeared and some of the bands became commercially successful, the musical industry tried to force them back to old stereotypes.[34] "#1 Must Have" fights back and rekindles the Riot Grrrl spirit: "watch me make up my mind instead of my face".

The outro of the song strongly emphasises the notion of music as a tool for change in feminism. The voice states that she wishes she "could write more than the next marketing bid" and exhorts the audience to be creative because "now is the time to invent." In this case, Sleater-Kinney addresses both their fans and their fellow female musicians to regain the power and drive that were lost after the Riot Grrrl scene was over. Songs like "#1 Must Have" are necessary in a context where there are "many obstacles preventing women from participating fully (or, at some moments in history, from participating at all) in musical production", most of them being institutional such as lack of proper musical training or professional connections (McClary 18). Music composed by women has been traditionally associated with stereotypical misconception about femininity, which is precisely what Sleater-Kinney were fighting against in this song.[35]

Misogyny in music does not only affect bands and singers, but female fans as well. The infamous allegations of sexual violence at Woodstock were already bad enough by themselves, but it was "particularly disturbing is that, in some cases, girls were forcefully pulled into the area in front of the stage, stripped of their clothes, molested, and raped within the mosh pit as bands continued to play" (Gamboa 106). There seemed to be a disturbing complicity in the audience that downplayed and delegitimised those sexual assaults. In "#1 Must Have" Sleater-Kinney insisted that "the number one must have is that we are safe", while trying to detached

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[33] As it is with many other movements, the inclusive and integrating ethics of punk "did not always translate into practice. Girls were still in the minority: punk was 60–70 percent male" (Daugherty 32). No genre in music has ever been free from misogyny.

[34] "In punk, female singers dispensed with the 'female in rock' and 'female in pop' stereotypes, and the rules of skill and stereotype that applied to each … Dave Laing labels the two main styles of rock and pop vocals as 'confidential' and 'declamatory' modes of singing: punk singing was almost exclusively declamatory" (Reddington 115–116). After the riot, many female musicians fell back into the "confidential" vocal style.

[35] Music composed by women "has often been received in terms of the essentialist stereotypes ascribed to women by masculine culture: it is repeatedly condemned as pretty yet trivial or – in the event that it does not conform to standards of feminine propriety – as aggressive and unbefitting a woman" (McClary 19).

themselves from a marketing system that promises fame in exchange for the rejection of the social denounce Riot Grrrl was best known for: "I've been crawling up so long on your stairway to heaven and now I no longer believe that I wanna get in".[36]

Ultimately, "#1 Must Have" has two main interpretations. First and foremost, it is an apology to fans not only from the band in particular, but from the Riot Grrrl movement in general for the lack of commitment and cohesion in the scene during the late 90s, and the switch from underground to mainstream of many of the groups: "Hello, weren't you the one that sold your soul? … Oh no, weren't you the one that let us go?." On the other hand, the song is also a vindication of the value of female composers and performers in music. Both the original punk and the Riot Grrrl scenes encouraged girls to grab an instrument and play or sing, but the concept of a girl in a band was still seen as a novelty in the industry.[37] The early 2000s saw the emergence of a new series of strong and dominating female artists in music, particularly within pop. Sleater-Kinney with their "#1 Must Have" was trying both to encourage this new generation of performers and to keep the punk spirit alive.

7.2. Girls to the front: female domination in music

Patti Smith's "Gloria: In Excelsis Deo" (see Appendix 10) turned Van Morrison's "Gloria" upside down, reverting sexual roles and giving a whole new meaning to its memorable "G-L-O-R-I-A" chorus. Combining Morrison's classical garage rock style with her poetry, Smith ignored "heteronormative values in her lyrics, [and her] presence on stage mirrored the untraditional qualities of her writing" (Roberson 8–9). Dressed in a white dress shirt and a black tie in the cover of Horses, she plays with her androgynous image and the sexual ambiguity of the song. Smith's cover is similar enough to Morrison's song to make the audience think that she is singing from a male perspective, and different enough to leave them wondering if it is, perhaps, a lesbian anthem.[38] Either way, her appropriation of typical male discourse combined with poetry – a traditionally female-oriented genre – makes "Gloria: In Excelsis Deo" a strong statement about empowerment and freedom.

The famous opening lines of "Gloria: In Excelsis Deo" have been – and still are – open to debate for their religious connotations: "Jesus died for somebody's sins but not mine." They were not present in the original Morrison's song and are part of Smith's poem "Oath," written in 1970.[39] According to her, this was both a "rebellion against her strict Jehovah's Witness

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[36] Sleater-Kinney satirically references hyper-masculinised band Led Zeppelin's classical 1971 superhit "Stairway to Heaven" – considered one of the greatest rock songs of all times – that seemingly tells the story of a "greedy woman who is overly optimistic about her unpromising future" (Genius). Due to its complex lyrics, however, it can be open to several different interpretations.

[37] "Girls playing instruments in bands have continually been seen as a novelty by promoters … and within punk there was a dual ethic of promoting bands with women members, first, because they would draw crowds … and second, because of the ideological clout one would acquire" (Reddington 39).

[38] Patti Smith often writes from a male perspective and has assured several times that "[she] enjoys doing transgender songs" and that "[her] work does not reflect [her] sexual preferences" (qtd. in Padgett). The lesbian reading of "Gloria: In Excelsis Deo" was originally not intentional on her part.

[39] Patti Smith discovered poetry after finishing high school through the work of French symbolist Arthur Rimbaud. She wrote poetry and critical essays for magazines like *Rolling Stone*, *Rock*, and *Creem*, and by 1973 she had published three poetry books. She started reading her poems publicly, accompanied by guitarist Lenny Kaye, and in 1975 she debuted with her LP *Horses* (*The Columbia Encyclopedia*).

upbringing" and a chance for people "to be blasphemous through [her]" (Padgett). Smith's provocative attitude in including religious criticism in her poems and lyrics deviates from what was considered appropriate for female songwriters, who were expected to focus strictly on traditional romance and heteronormative relationships.

In this sense, "Gloria: In Excelsis Deo" challenges conventional gender and sexual dynamics. Smith's process of creation itself is already devoid of gender impositions: ''As an artist, I don't feel any gender restriction. When I'm performing, it's a very … transcendent experience. I can't say I feel like a male or a female. Or both. What I feel is not in the human vocabulary" (qtd. in Carson 43). Although she did not intend to write a song about lesbianism, Smith's refusal to conform to regular standards in songwriting is a declaration of intent. Instead of switching genders in her cover, she kept Morrison's original but added enough of herself to make the song her own – apart from the opening section, the lines "humpin' on the parking meter, leanin' on the parking meter" and the reference to the red dress are Smith's own additions.[40]

There is one last significant difference between the original and the cover. After the initial lines concerning religion, Smith added: "people say 'beware!' But I don't care. Their words are just rules and regulations to me." These words are open to many interpretations but are overall a rebellion against any form of imposition. As a punk-rock musician, Smith had no choice but to continually question standard values. Cultural expectations of femininity and traditional views on rock's masculinity have forced women in rock to "negotiate a resistant identity – one that claims women can sweat, jump, shout, and play rock music in ways that do not simply mimic traditional male forms of playing" (Carson 4).

Overall, "Gloria: In Excelsis Deo" is considered one of the staples of feminist punk, not only for the accidental – but obvious – lesbian connotations, but for the way in which Patti Smith subverted male discourse. Musicians like her and songs like this paved the way for future generations of female artists that would eventually dominate the musical scene in many other genres apart from punk and rock – Madonna herself named Smith as an inspiration in an HMV ad campaign (Padgett) – and is generally mentioned by Riot Grrrl performers as one of the big names that influenced them and their music.

8. Conclusion

The Riot Grrrl movement was born from the ashes of punk and its ethics of inclusiveness and integration. It was conceived to serve as a safe space to discuss female concerns and used the medium of punk music as a platform to spread feminist concerns and ideas among a new and younger audience. This small group of bands grew and eventually led to the emergence of a fourth wave of feminists that, unlike its predecessors, made greater and better use of popular

[40] Van Morrison was asked his opinion about the cover in a Rolling Stone issue, to which he responded that he had heard it and that he "could even dig that for what it [was]." He also stated: "It doesn't floor me like some things. I'm the type of cat that would listen to black soul music or black gospel music … that's what I would listen to. But if something comes along like what Patti Smith is doing, I have a tendency now to accept it as what it is and get off … it's just what it is, and I enjoy it that way" (qtd. in Padgett).

culture manifestations to fight for gender and racial equality, and to denounce sexism and violence against women.

Performers and bands like Patti Smith, Poly Styrene, or The Slits laid a strong and solid foundation during the late 1970s for future generations to come, and a decade and a half later the baton was collected by iconic Kathleen Hanna, who was promptly followed by tens of artists who had many things to say. Songs like “Oh Bondage! Up Yours!” or “Rebel Girl” were the anthems that those generations of girls needed during a time when their voices were consistently shunned and ignored.

The eventual extinction of the movement was a logical consequence of its limited scope and the anti-capitalist mentality of many of the members, who failed – intentionally or not – to achieve commercial success in the mainstream industry. Nevertheless, the profound impact that it had on later generations of musicians is undeniable. It not only laid the foundation for stronger and renewed female contributions in music and the arts in general, but also educated a whole new generation on feminism.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Riot Grrrl Manifesto (*Bikini Kill Zine 2*, 1991)

BECAUSE us girls crave records and books and fanzines that speak to US that WE feel included in and can understand in our own ways.

BECAUSE we wanna make it easier for girls to see/hear each other's work so that we can share strategies and criticize-applaud each other.

BECAUSE we must take over the means of production in order to create our own moanings.

BECAUSE viewing our work as being connected to our girlfriends-politics-real lives is essential if we are gonna figure out how we are doing impacts, reflects, perpetuates, or DISRUPTS the status quo.

BECAUSE we recognize fantasies of Instant Macho Gun Revolution as impractical lies meant to keep us simply dreaming instead of becoming our dreams AND THUS seek to create revolution in our own lives every single day by envisioning and creating alternatives to the bullshit christian capitalist way of doing things.

BECAUSE we want and need to encourage and be encouraged in the face of all our own insecurities, in the face of beergutboyrock that tells us we can't play our instruments, in the face of "authorities" who say our bands/zines/etc are the worst in the US and

BECAUSE we don't wanna assimilate to someone else's (boy) standards of what is or isn't.

BECAUSE we are unwilling to falter under claims that we are reactionary "reverse sexists" AND NOT THE TRUEPUNKROCKSOULCRUSADERS THAT WE KNOW we really are.

BECAUSE we know that life is much more than physical survival and are patently aware that the punk rock "you can do anything" idea is crucial to the coming angry grrrl rock revolution which seeks to save the psychic and cultural lives of girls and women everywhere, according to their own terms, not ours.

BECAUSE we are interested in creating non-heirarchical ways of being AND making music, friends, and scenes based on communication + understanding, instead of competition + good/bad categorizations.

BECAUSE doing/reading/seeing/hearing cool things that validate and challenge us can help us gain the strength and sense of community that we need in order to figure out how bullshit like racism, able-bodieism, ageism, speciesism, classism, thinism, sexism, anti-semitism and heterosexism figures in our own lives.

BECAUSE we see fostering and supporting girl scenes and girl artists of all kinds as integral to this process.

BECAUSE we hate capitalism in all its forms and see our main goal as sharing information and staying alive, instead of making profits of being cool according to traditional standards.

BECAUSE we are angry at a society that tells us Girl = Dumb, Girl = Bad, Girl = Weak.

BECAUSE we are unwilling to let our real and valid anger be diffused and/or turned against us via the internalization of sexism as witnessed in girl/girl jealousism and self-defeating girltype behaviors.
BECAUSE I believe with my wholeheartmindbody that girls constitute a revolutionary soul force that can and will change the world for real.

Appendix 2: The Slits, “Typical Girls” (1979)

[Hook]
Don't create
Don't rebel
Have intuition
Can't decide

Typical girls get upset too quickly
Typical girls can't control themselves
Typical girls are so confusing
Typical girls, you can always tell
Typical girls don't think too clearly
Typical girls are unpredictable, predictable

[Chorus 1]
Typical girls try to be
Typical girls very well
Typical girls try to be
Typical girls very well, well

Typical girls are looking for something
Typical girls fall under spells
Typical girls buy magazines
Typical girls feel like hell
Typical girls worry about spots, fat
And natural smells, stinky fake smells

[Chorus 1]
[Hook]

[Chorus 2]
Typical girls try to be
Typical girls very well
Can't decide what clothes to wear

Typical girls are sensitive

Typical girls are emotional
Typical girls are cruel and bewitching
But she's a femme fatalle
Typical girls stand by their man
Typical girls are really swell
Typical girls learn how to act shocked
Typical girls don't rebel

[Chorus 3] (x2)
Who invented the typical girl?
Who's bringing out the new improved model?
And there's another marketing ploy
Typical girl gets the typical boy

[Outro] x (2)
The typical boy gets the typical girl
The typical girl gets the typical boy
Are emotional

Appendix 3: Bush Tetras, “Too Many Creeps” (1980)

I just don't wanna go
Out in the streets no more
I just don't wanna go
Out in the streets no more
Because these people they give me
They give me the creeps
Anymore
Because these people they give me
They give me the creeps
Anymore
I don't wanna
Too many creeps
Yeah
I just can't pay the price
Of shopping around
No more
I just can't pay the price
Of shopping around
No more
Because there's just nothing
That's worth the cost
It's the worst

Because there's just nothing
That's worth the cost
Cause it's the worst
I don't wanna
Cause it's the worst
It's the worst
I just don't wanna go
Out in the streets no more
I just don't wanna go
Out in the streets no more
Because these people they give me
They give me the creeps
Anymore
Because these people they give me
They give me the creeps
Anymore
I don't wanna
Too many creeps
Yeah

Appendix 4: Kleenex, “Hitch-hike” (1980)

Girl was on road to drive away, she had no money to pay the train
Girl was on road to drive away, she had no money to pay the train

[Chorus]
Hitch-Hike girls, don't touch me
Hitch-Hike girls, I'm afraid
Hitch-Hike girls, let me be

Appendix 5: X-Ray Spex, “Oh Bondage! Up Yours!” (1977)

Some people think little girls should be seen and not heard
But I think
‘Oh bondage, up yours’
One, two, three, four
Bind me, tie me
Chain me to the wall
I wanna be a slave to you all

[Chorus]
Oh bondage, up yours
Oh bondage, no more

Oh bondage, up yours
Oh bondage, no more

Chain-store, chain-smoke
I consume you all
Chain-gang, chain-mail
I don't think at all

[Chorus]

Thrash me, crash me
Beat me 'til I fall
I wanna be a victim for you all

[Chorus]

Bind me, tie me
Chain me to the wall
I wanna be a slave to you all

[Chorus]

Bind me, tie me
Chain me to the wall
I wanna be a slave for you all

Appendix 6: Bikini Kill, “I Like Fucking” (1995)

Hey, do you believe there's anything
Beyond troll-guy reality?
I do, I do, I do

It gets so hard just to be okay
Sometimes being happy, baby
Is what I'm most afraid of
Baby, you know
It gets so hard for me to fight
I don't know why, I guess I never did
Why don't you show me now
How to lose control

She's so very I don't care
She's so very I don't care

Just cause my world, sweet sister
Is so fucking goddamn full of rape
Does that mean my body
Must always be a source of pain?
No, no, no

She's so very I don't care
She's so very I don't care

Just cause I named it right here, sweet chickadee
Don't mean for a minute you should think
I'm the opposite of anything
But if you want to know for sure, I'll tell you
We're not going to prove nothing, nothing
Sitting around, watching each other starve
What we need is action, strategy
I want, I want, I want, I want
I want it now
(Want it now)

I believe in the radical possibilities of pleasure, babe
I do, I do, I do

Appendix 7: Bikini Kill, “Rebel Girl” (1993)

That girl thinks she's the queen of the neighbourhood
She's got the hottest trike in town
That girl, she holds her head up so high
I think I wanna be her best friend, yeah

[Chorus]
Rebel girl, rebel girl
Rebel girl you are the queen of my world
Rebel girl, rebel girl
I think I wanna take you home
I wanna try on your clothes, uh

When she talks, I hear the revolution
In her hips, there's revolution
When she walks, the revolution's coming
In her kiss, I taste the revolution

[Chorus]

That girl thinks she's the queen of the neighbourhood
I got news for you, she is
They say she's a dyke, but I know
She is my best friend, yeah

[Chorus]

Love you like a sister always
Soul sister, rebel girl
Come and be my best friend
Will you, rebel girl?
I really like you
I really wanna be your best friend
Be my rebel girl

Appendix 8: PJ Harvey, “50 Ft. Queenie” (1993)

Hey I'm one big queen
No one can stop me
Red light, red green
Sat back, I'm watching
I'm number one
Second to no one
No sweat, I'm clean
Nothing can touch me

Tell you my name
F U and C K
50ft Queenie
Force 10 hurricane
Biggest woman
I could have ten sons
Ten gods, ten queens
Ten foot and rising

Hey I'm the king of the world
You oughta hear my song
You come on, measure me
I'm twenty inches long

Glory, glory

Lay it all on me
50ft Queenie
50 and rising
You bend over
Casanova
No sweat, I'm clean
Nothing can touch me

Hey I'm the king of the world
You oughta hear my song
You come on, measure me
I'm twenty inches long
Hey I'm the king of the world
You oughta hear my song
You come on, measure me
I'm thirty inches long
Hey I'm the king of the world
You oughta hear my song
You come on, measure me
I'm forty inches long
Hey I'm king the of the world
You oughta hear my song
You come on, measure me
I'm fifty inches long

Appendix 9: Sleater-Kinney, "#1 Must Have" (2000)

Bearer of the flag from the beginning
Now, who would have believed this riot girl's a cynic?
But they took our ideas to their marketing stars
And now I'm spending all my days at girlpower.com
Trying to buy back a little piece of me
(Everywhere you go they say
'Hello, weren't you the one that sold your soul?'
Everywhere you go they say
'Oh no, weren't you the one that let us go?')

And I think that I sometimes might have wished
For something more than to be a size six
But now my inspiration rests
In between my beauty magazines and my credit card bills

I've been crawling up so long on your stairway to heaven

And now I no longer believe that I wanna get in
And will there always be concerts where women are raped?
Watch me make up my mind instead of my face
The number one must have is that we are safe
(Everywhere you go, teenage is the rage
Inside your pants and on the front page
Everywhere you look, it's die or be born
If you can't decide, it's your own war)

And I think that I sometimes must have wished
For something more than to be a size six
But now my inspiration rests
In between my beauty magazines and my credit card bills
No more
No more
No more

And for all the ladies out there
I wish we could write more than the next marketing bid
Culture is what we make it, yes it is
Now is the time
Now is the time
Now is the time to invent
Invent, invent, invent
Invent

Appendix 10: Patti Smith, “Gloria: In Excelsis Deo” (1975)

Jesus died for somebody's sins but not mine
Meltin' in a pot of thieves
Wild card up my sleeve
Thick heart of stone
My sins my own
They belong to me, me
People say "beware!"
But I don't care
Their words are just
Rules and regulations to me, me
I walk in a room, you know I look so proud
I'm movin' in this here atmosphere, well, anything's allowed
And I go to this here party and I just get bored
Until I look out the window, see a sweet young thing
Humpin' on the parking meter, leanin' on the parking meter

Oh, she looks so good, oh, she looks so fine
And I got this crazy feeling and then I'm gonna ah-ah make her mine
Oh I'll put my spell on her
Here she comes
Walkin' down the street
Here she comes
Comin' through my door
Here she comes
Crawlin' up my stair
Here she comes
Waltzin' through the hall
In a pretty red dress
And oh, she looks so good,
Oh, she looks so fine
And I got this crazy feeling that I'm gonna ah-ah make her mine
And then I hear this knockin' on my door
Hear this knockin' on my door
And I look up into the big tower clock
And say, "oh my God here's midnight!"
And my baby is walkin' through the door
Leanin' on my couch she whispers to me and I take the big plunge
And oh, she was so good
Oh, she was so fine
And I'm gonna tell the world that I just ah-ah made her mine
And I said darling, tell me your name, she told me her name
She whispered to me, she told me her name
And her name is, and her name is, and her name is, and her name is G-L-O-R-I-A
G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria
G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria
I was at the stadium
There were twenty thousand girls called their names out to me
Marie and Ruth but to tell you the truth
I didn't hear them I didn't see
I let my eyes rise to the big tower clock
And I heard those bells chimin' in my heart
Going ding dong ding dong ding dong ding dong
Ding dong ding dong ding dong ding dong
Counting the time, then you came to my room
And you whispered to me and we took the big plunge
And oh you were so good, oh, you were so fine
And I gotta tell the world that I make her mine make her mine
Make her mine make her mine make her mine make her mine
G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria,

G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria
And the tower bells chime, "ding dong" they chime
They're singing, "Jesus died for somebody's sins but not mine."
Gloria G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria G-L-O-R-I-A,
Gloria G-L-O-R-I-A, G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria
G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria,
G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria,
G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria G-L-O-R-I-A Gloria

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